

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8002

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 8290

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MILI, BR

SUBJECT: MILITARY GESTURES TOWARD POLITICIANS AND LIBERAL LEFT

REF: BRASILIA 7387 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: SERIES OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS GESTURES BY TOP BRAZILIAN MILITARY OFFICERS DURING SEPTEMBER WITH ONE MAJOR EXCEPTION, HAVE COLLECTIVELY HAD EFFECT AT LEAST SHORT TERM, OF PORTRAYING MILITARY HIEARCHY AS LESS UNSYMPATHETIC THAN HEREFOR POLITICAL AN SOCIAL ASPIRATIONS AND MORE INTERESTED IN OPENNING CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION TO POLITICAL CLASS, LABOR UNIONS AND LIBERALS INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE TENDED IN PAST TO BE SUSPECT TO THE REVOLUTION. THE GOVERNEMENT MAY BE TRYING TO CALM THE NATIONAL POLITICAL SCENE PRIOR TO THE NOVEMBER 15 MUNICIPAL ELECTION AND ALLAY OPPOSITION FEARS SPARKED BY RIGHT-WING TERRIORTS ACTS AND RHETORICAL SSALTS DURING AUGUST. END SUMMARY.

2. MOST NEWSWORTHY GESTURE IN MILITARYS OURTREACH EFFORT WAS ON SEPTMBER 2 WHEN THE ARMY AND NAVY MINISTERS,
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ACCOMPANED BY OVER FIFTY GENERAL AND FLAG OFFICERS FROM

THE THREE SERVICES, ATTENDED A CONGRESSIONAL SESSION HELD IN HONOR OF THE PATRON OF THE BRAZILIAN ARMY, THE DUKE OF CAXIAS. ARMY MINISTER GENERAL SYLVIO FROTA SAT ON THE PODIUM WITH THE OFFICERS OF THE CONGRESS, AND AT A RECEPTION AFTER THE SPEECHES HE INCLUDED UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR, MDB SENATORS MARCOS FREIRE (PERNAMBUCO) AND AGENOR MARIA (RIO GRANDE DO NORTE) IN INVITATION TO ATTEND THE CHANGE-OF-COMMAND CEREMONIES FOR THE FOURTH ARMY AT RECIFE

3. THE NEXT DAY FROTA SENT SENATOR MAGALHAES PINTO, PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS, A LETTER PRAISING THE CEREMONY IN HONOR OF CAXIAS AND POINTING OUT THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE ARMY. BOTH ARE NATIONAL GROUPS DRAWN FROM THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE AND FROM ALL SOCIAL CLASSES, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS, SAID THE LETTER. BOTH INSTITUTIONS WORK FOR THE NATIONAL GOOD AND, FROTA NOTED, DIVERGENCES OF VIEWPOINT BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE MILITARY WOULD NOT DIMINISH ON EITHER SIDE OF FEELINGS OF SOLIDARITY, COMRADESHIP, UNDERSTANDING AND UNION IN THE DEFENSE OF BASIC NATIONAL PRINCIPLES.

4. O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO OF SEPTEMBER 8 TOOK EDITORIAL NOTE OF FROTA'S LETTER, SAYING THAT IT RECALLED THE OLD DAYS OF CIVILIZED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LEGISLATORS AND MILITARY OFFICERS. REFERRING TO FROTA'S APPEARANCES IN CONGRESS, HIS INCLUSION OF THE TWO MDB SENATORS IN HIS RECIFE INVITATION AND HIS SUBSEQUENT LETTER, O ESTADO SAID: "IT WAS ENOUGH TO CLEAR THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE AND MAKE EACH ONE ASK IF, AFTER ALL, THE MOMENT OF GREAT NATIONAL UNDERSTANDING HAD ARRIVED."

5. ON SEPTEMBER 10 SECOND ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL DILERMANDO MINTEIRO PAID A 45-MINUTE VISIT TO THE PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS UNION IN SAO PAULO ON THE OCCASION OF PRESS DAY. DILERMANDO READ A CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE OF APPRECIATION FOR THE WORK OF JOURNALISTS AND MADE A FEW APPROPRIATE IMPROMPTU REMARKS, WHICH A UNION LEADER REPLIED TO IN KIND. DURING THE SAME WEEK GENERAL DILERMANDO ALSO VISITED THE METAL WORKERS UNION IN SAO PAULO GOVERNOR PAULO EGYDIO PRONOUNCED THE VISITS "A GESTURE WHICH GOES BEYOND

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THE BOUNDARIES OF SAO PAULO AND GIVES US AN OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF THE BRAZILIAN SITUATION." IT HAS NOT ESCAPED NOTICE THAT SAO PAULO JOURNALIST AND METALWORKERS WERE UNDER GENERAL DILERMANDO'S PREDECESSOR, GENERAL EDNARDO D'AVILLA MELLO CONSIDERED BY SECURITY FORCES TO BE SHARPLY LEFT-LEANING ORGANIZATIONS SERIOUSLY INFILTRATED BY COMMUNISTS. IT IS ALSO RECALLED THAT SEVERAL OF MORE NOTORIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN SAO PAULO WHICH ULTIMATED LED TO EDNARDO'S

REMOVAL BY GEISEL HAD AS THEIR VICTIMS MEMBERS OF
THOSE TWO ORGANIZATIONS.

6. DURING AUGUST AND EARLY SEPTEMBER FIRST ARMY COMMANDER
GENERAL REYNALDO MELLO DE ALMEIDA MADE A SERIES OF
VISITS AND MEETINGS WITH BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL
ASSOCIATIONS AND WAS GUEST OF HONOR AT THE MONTHLY
LUNCHEON OF THE "ORDER OF OLD JOURNALISTS." ASKED BY
REPORTER IN SLAVADOR, ON SEPTEMBER 8 ABOUT SIGNIFICANCE
OF THIS APPARENT WARMING IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE
MILITARY AND POLITICIANS, NAVY MINISTER ADMIRAL GERALDO
HENNING ADAID THERE HAD NOT BEEN A TIGHTENING OF
RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL LEADERS
BECAUSE "THERE NEVER WAS A SEPARATION BETWEEN POLITICIANS
AND THE ARMED FORCES."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRASILIA 8290

7. MAJOR DIVERGENCES FROM THIS CONCILIATORY APPROACH
WAS SPEECH OF FOURTH ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL ARGUS LIMA AT THE
CHANGE-OF-COMMAND CEREMONIES IN RECIFE ON SEPTEMBER 10.
PRESUMABLY NOT UNMINDFUL OF THE MDB SENATORIAL GUESTS INCLUDED IN
ARMY MINISTER FROTA'S INVITATION, ARGUS LIMSA SAID "WE ASPIRE,
WE MOST ARDENTLY DESIRE TO LIVE IN A DEMOCRATIC REGIME

BECAUSE DEMOCRACY IS IN THE CONSCIENCE AND IN THE CHARACTER OF OUR PEOPLE. HOWEVER, THE DEMOCRACY WHICH WE DESIRE IS NOT NECESSARILY LUKEWARM, NEGLIGENT, CRAWLING, UNANIMOUS, INERT AND DEFENSELESS, THAT WOULD SHAKE AT THE SIMPLE QUOTATION OF PREFABRICATED SLOGANS, BASED, FALLACIOUSLY, ON LIBERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THE DECEITFUL DEFENDERS OF THIS LINE FORGET, OR RATHER THEY DELIBERATELY CONCEAL, FROM THE UNINFORMED THAT LIBERTY AND RIGHTS EMANATE FROM THE STATE. IT GRANTS THESE PRIVILEGES TO MAN AND CONSEQUENTLY THE STATE CANNOT BE SUBORDINATE TO SIMILAR PREROGATIVES UNDER PENALTY OF BEING MARKED BY ANARCHY."

8. AN ANALYSIS IN O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO ASSERTED THAT ARGUS LIMA'S THEORY OF DEMOCRACY WAS NOT THE DOMINANT VIEW IN THE MILITARY BUT JUST THE OPINION OF ONE OF SEVERAL GROUPS. THE
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ARTICLE CHARGED THAT PRESIDENT GEISEL DID NOT SHARE ARGUS LIMA'S VIEW BUT THEN NEITHER DID HE SHARE THAT OF ARMY MINISTER FROTA, WHO WAS DESCRIBED AS ADVOCATING A VARIATION OF DISTENSAO. A COLUMN IN JORNAL DO BRASIL BY A COLUMNIST BELIEVED TO REFLECT THE GOVERNMENT LINE WENT ONE STEP FURTHER AND TRIED TO EXPLAIN AWAY ARGUS LIMA'S CONTENTION THAT HUMAN RIGHTS EMANATE FROM THE STATE, PRECISELY THE STATEMENT WHICH DREW MOST ATTACKS.

9. THE DAY AFTER HIS CONTROVERSIAL SPEECH APPEARED, ARGUS LIMA, WHO IS WIDELY REGARDED AS A LONGSTANDING DISCIPLE OF GEISEL AND HIS PERSONAL CHOICE FOR THE RECIFE POST, TOLD THE PRESS THAT HIS SPEECH HAD BEEN A PERSONAL STATEMENT OF HIS VIEWS INTENDED PRIMARILY FOR MEMBERS OF HIS COMMAND AND NOT A POLITICAL STATEMENT. THEN, ON SEPTEMBER 20, ARGUS LIMA FOLLOWED EXAMPLE OF DILERMANDO AND OTHER ARMY COMMANDERS BY MAKING WELL-PUBLICIZED CALL ON PERNAMBUCO CHAPTER OF THE JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION (ABI) AND EXPRESSING HIS HOPE FOR CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH THE PRESS.

10. COMMENT: A WIDE VARIETY OF EXPLANATIONS OF THE MILITARY'S INCREASED CORDIALITY, WHICH IS GENERALLY ASSUMED NOT TO BE FORTUITOUS, HAS BEEN ADVANCED IN POLITICAL CIRCLES. ONE SUCH EXPLANATION, IS THAT GENERALS FROTA AND DILERMANDO ARE BOTH NOW OFF AND RUNNING TO SUCCEED GEISEL IN 1979 AND, ACCORDINGLY, ARE MENDING THEIR FENCES WITH IMPORTANT CENTERS OF CIVILIAN POLITICAL INFLUENCE. MORE REASONABLE, IT SEEMS TO US, IS EXPLANATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO CALM THE PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE AS WELL AS THE APPREHENSIONS OF OPPOSITION ELEMENTS FOLLOWING THE TERRORISTS BOMBING AND RIGHT-WING RHETORICAL ATTACKS OF JULY AND AUGUST (BRASILIA 7387), WHICH RAISED FEARS THAT THE NOVEMBER 15 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MIGHT NOT TAKE PLACE.

SEVERAL OBSERVERS SAW THE MILITARY'S GESTURES TO THE LEFT AS A DELIBERATE SIGNAL, ORDERED BY GEISEL, TO THE POLITICAL RIGHT THAT IT COULD NOT ASSUME THE PASSIVE ACQUIESCENCE OF THE TOP MILITARY IN EFFORTS TO POLARIZE THE POLITICAL PROCESS OR TO INTERFERE WITH THE PRESIDENT'S MODEST LIBERALIZATION PLANS. KEYNOTING THIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST POLARIZATION WAS PRESIDENT GEISEL'S SPEECH OF AUGUST 27 IN RIO GRANDE DO SUL IN WHICH HE CONDEMNED BOTH LEFTWING AND RIGHTWING EXTREMISM
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IN ARENA--A CONDEMNATION SUBSEQUENTLY INTERPRETED BY HIS PRESS SECRETARY TO APPLY TO EXTREMISM OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT EVERYWHERE. GENERAL ARGUS LIMA CHOSE AN INCONGRUOUS TIME TO AIR HIS TOTALITARIAN POLITICAL VIEWS, BUT IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT HE, AS A GENERAL NOT NOTED FOR SENSITIVITY, WAS UNPREPARED FOR THE REACTION TO WHAT HE MAY VIEW AS ABSTRACT THEORIZING. HIS SUBSEQUENT STATEMENT AND ACTIONS HEWED MORE CLOSELY TO THE CONCILIATORY LINE.

11. SUCH GESTURES BEYOND THE MILITARY'S NORMAL CONSTITUENCY, OF COURSE, ARE NOT WITHOUT COST TO GEISEL AND HIS TOP COMMANDERS IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE MORE CONSERVATIVE MILITARY ELEMENTS AND SECURITY FORCES COMPRISING THE "SYSTEM." SOME REPORTS INDICATE THAT HOSPITABLE GESTURES TO ALLEGED "COMMUNISTS" OR "COMMUNIST-SYMPATHIZERS" SUCH AS MDB SENATOR MARCOS FREIRE HAVE ALREADY BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY THE SECURITY FORCES AS LITTLE LESS THAN "TREASONOUS."
END COMMENT.
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